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THE MORLEY MEMOIRS

WE are wont to regard the Victorian Age with a certain condescension, and to hold cheaply, if not to ridicule, the men and manners of that period. The very term, mid-Victorian, is used in a deprecatory sense, and is a synonym for priggishness and banality. We judge the age from the undeniably bad taste of the house furnishings and architecture, from the stilted sentimentality of the popular novels, the pompous formality of the dress and customs, the dreary Sabbaths, the puritanical repression of spontaneity and joy, the apparently supine acceptance of dogmatic religion and nursery traditions.

But how superficial our judgments appear when we compare the men and achievements of those times with our own and take into account the difficulties encountered by the intellectual, social and political pioneers during the latter half of the nineteenth century. We deem ourselves to be heroes of revolt, but revolt is easy nowadays; it is becoming fashionable to stand on one's head. We have reversed the aphorism so often that the reversal itself has become trite; in our frantic efforts to escape the bromide we have made the epigram bromidic. It is rather daring to defend the police.

We hardly appreciate, therefore, the courage required by the insurgents of sixty years ago; and, measured by actual achievement, there is nothing we have accomplished which compares in importance and far-reaching results to the political and intellectual insurrection of the earlier period. Not since the Renais-

sance has the thought of men been so profoundly affected as it has been by the teachings of the early evolutionists. It is safe to say, moreover, that no single work has ever changed so radically the entire view-point of the world as it was changed by the appearance of Darwin's great book in 1859. It was not alone that dogmatic theology received a blow from which it has never recovered, but in all departments of thought the scientific attitude of searching only for the truth, regardless of the outcome, has since then predominated. It is true that in its attempt to explain the universe science reached an *impasse*, and there is a tendency to a return to the older speculative philosophy. Nevertheless while science has relegated to the metaphysicians and neo-Platonists the investigation of matters manifestly outside of its domain, its spirit is everywhere active in the material affairs of men. It is hardly possible to conceive of any three individuals of our day whose work will attain the lasting importance of that of the great agnostic triumvirate of the last century—Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley. The Bolsheviki are mere parlor reformers compared to these men.

We are greatly indebted to Viscount Morley for his *Recollections*,* which cover the greater part of this period of revolt and during which the new opinions were being fiercely debated; nor can we think of any one being better fitted to portray the men and events. Born in 1838 Morley was associated from his Oxford days with

* *Recollections*, by John, Viscount Morley. New York, The Macmillan Co., 1917.

most of the political and intellectual leaders in England, and with many on the Continent. By profession a man of letters, he became a politician and filled several high posts in the British cabinets under Gladstone and other Prime Ministers. He enjoys, therefore, the distinction of being not only an actor in the drama but also of being professionally qualified to describe the scenes. His recollections have an additional interest due to the fact that he is still a privileged spectator of the contemporary drama, and is in a position to check his judgments by the historical perspective of his own lifetime.

His style is clear, concise, vigorous and transparent; it is neither "precious" on the one hand, nor stilted on the other, but flows with easy grace—an ideal style for a commentator and illuminator of the past. Morley was inclined to be a Radical both politically and intellectually, and was a disciple of Mill, whose pamphlet on the *Subjection of Women* leaves few arguments for the modern feminist to discover. As an interesting side-light on the point of view during his early days Morley says that he was regarded with horror, as an agnostic, because he spelled God with a small "g" in one of his essays.

The author informs us in his opening chapter that during his undergraduate days the metaphysical quarrel between intuition and experience filled the sacred galleries of St. Mary's with agitated undergraduates, and that: "Loud became the din of internecine war. One group of scientific men fought another group over the origin of species. Within the bosom of the Church of England orthodox divines dragged other divines, including even a bishop, into courts of law. Wiseman had seriously begun the important movement that was destined,

under the later influence of men of spiritual genius and literary power like Newman, and men with the art and talent of governing like Manning, to go so far towards bringing Roman Catholic ideals into the English field of serious argument, and securing for their professors the same liberality and same respect as was usual towards other communions. In my college we had the first Catholic undergraduate. The divers German schools began to find clandestine way into theological disputation here, and traditional thought, devotion, dogma, were brought from their place of inaccessible constellations in the spacious firmament on high, down into the rationalist arena of earth. The force of miracle and myth and intervening Will in the interpretation of the world began to give way before the reign of law."

It is to the *personalia*, however, that the reader of these memoirs, will turn, doubtless, with the greatest interest, and to what a goodly company is he introduced. Among those who stand out on the pages of this notable work are: George Meredith, Mill, George Eliot, Spencer, Tyndall, Huxley, Comte, Mazzini, Victor Hugo, George Sand, Carlyle, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, Gladstone, Parnell, Rosebery, Chamberlain, and many other famous men and women of the times. In the Meredith chapter we are told that subsequent to the Franco-Prussian war Meredith realised the force of Henry Bulwer's pungent saying that, after 1871, Europe had lost a mistress and found a master. This, however, did not alter his feeling for the gifts of France which the poet expressed in verses that are well worth reprinting at this time.

We look for her that sunlike stood
Upon the forehead of our day,
An orb of nations, radiating food
For body and for mind away.

Where is the Shape of glad array;
 The nervous hands, the front of steel,
 The clarion tongue? Where is the bold,
 proud face?
 We see a vacant place;
 We hear an iron heel.

Many men doubtless will recognise among their friends' wives some one who bears out Carlyle's description of Mrs. Mills: "She was a woman full of unwise intellect, always asking questions about all sorts of puzzles—why, what for, how, what makes the exact difference. . . ."

Further we are told of the desperate case put by Bishop Butler who, one night walking in the gardens behind his palace, suddenly turned to his chaplain and amazed him by the question whether public bodies might not go mad like individuals, for in truth nothing else could account for most of the transactions of history. And yet Germany had not then run amuck through the streets of Europe.

To those who are contending acrimoniously as to the merits of free verse, futurism in painting and other new forms of artistic expression, Pater's words are particularly recommended:

In truth the legitimate contention is not of one age or school of literary art against another, but of all successive schools alike, against the stupidity which is dead to the substance, and the vulgarity which is dead to form.

And the following account of an exhibition of high thinking at the dinner-table will appear somewhat strange to those whose principal topics of conversation in like case are food, fashions and personalities.

The only time that I recall anything like monologue at Mill's table, Spencer was the involuntary hero. The host said to him at dessert

that Grote, who was present, would like to hear him explain one or more of his views about the equilibration of molecules in some relation or another. Spencer, after an instant of good-natured hesitation, complied with unbroken fluency for a quarter of an hour or more. Grote followed every word intently, and in the end expressed himself as well satisfied. Mill, as we moved off into the drawing-room, declared to me his admiration of a wonderful piece of lucid exposition. Fawcett in a whisper asked me if I understood a word of it, for he did not. Luckily I had no time to answer.

As the matter of prohibition is now much under discussion the conversation between Chamberlain and Carlyle as to the propriety of compensation to dispossessed publicans is of interest. Carlyle is reported as

Fiercely smiting the arms of his chair, with strong voice and flashing eye, he summoned an imaginary publican before him. "Compensation!" he cried, "you dare come to me for compensation! I'll tell you where to go for compensation! Go to your father the devil, let him compensate you"—and so on in one of his highest flights of diatribe. Chamberlain, still as a stock, listened with deferential silence for long minutes, until he was able in patient tone to put the case of the respectable butler whom a grateful master had set up in a licensed and well-conducted tavern: was Mr. Carlyle sure that to turn him out, bag and baggage, was quite fair play? And so on through the arguments. The old Ram Dass with the fire in his belly attentively listened, and then admitted genially that he might have been all wrong.

The soap-box orators, discharged college professors, professional pacifists and other jawsmiths of sedition and unrest might do well to read Viscount Morley's own words in regard to the so-called natural rights of man:

No right is worth a straw apart from the good that it brings, and claims to right must depend not upon nature, but upon the good that the said rights are calculated to bring to the greatest number.

H. McD. S.